

OF GOD'S WORD

I.

That the Bible is God's Word and book I prove thus: All things that have been, and are, in the world, and the manner of their being, are described in the first book of Moses on the creation; even as God made and shaped the world, so does it stand to this day. Infinite potentates have raged against this book, and sought to destroy and uproot it - king Alexander the Great, the princes of Egypt and of Babylon, the monarchs of Persia, of Greece, and of Rome, the emperors Julius and Augustus - but they nothing prevailed; they are all gone and vanished, while the book remains, and will remain for ever and ever, perfect and entire, as it was declared at first. Who has thus helped it - who has thus protected it against such mighty forces? No one, surely, but God himself, who is the master of all things. And its no small miracle how God has so long preserved and protected this book; for the devil and the world are sore foes to it. I believe that the devil has destroyed many good books of the church, as, aforetime, he killed and crushed many holy persons, the memory of whom has now passed away; but the Bible he was fain to leave subsisting. In like manner have bapitsm, the sacrament of the altar, of the true body and blood of Christ, and the office of preaching remained unto us, despite the infinitude of tyrants and heretic persecutors. God, with singular strength, has upheld these things; let us, then, baptize, administer the sacrament, and preach, fearless of impediment. Homer, Virgil, and other noble, fine, and profitable writers, have left us books of great antiquity, but they are naught to the Bible. While the Romish church stood, the Bible was never given to the people in such a shape that they could clearly, understandingly, surely, and easily read it, as they now can in the German translation, which, thank God, we have prepared here at Wittenberg.

II.

The Holy Scriptures are full of divine gifts and virtues. The books of the heathen taught nothing of faith, hope, or charity; they present no idea of these things; they contemplate only the present, and that which man, with the use of his material reason, can grasp and comprehend. Look not therein for aught of hope or trust in God. But see how the Psalms and the Book of Job treat of faith, hope, resignation, and prayer; in a word, the Holy Scripture is the highest and best of books, abounding in comfort under all afflictions and trials. It teaches us to see, to feel, to grasp, and to comprehend faith, hope, and charity, far otherwise than mere human reason can; and when evil oppresses us, it teaches how these virtues throw light upon the darkness, and how, after this poor miserable existence of ours on earth, there is another and an eternal life.

III.

St Jerome, after he had revised and corrected the Septuagint, translated the Bible from Hebrew into Latin; His version is still used in our church. Truly, for one man, this was work enough and to spare. *Nulla enim privata persona tantum efficere potuisset.* It would have been quite as well had he called to his aid one or two learned men, for the Holy Ghost would then have more powerfully manifested itself unto him, according to the words of Christ: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Interpreters and translators should not work alone; for good *et propria verba* do not always occur to one mind.

IV.

We ought not to criticize, explain, or judge the Scriptures by our mere reason, but diligently, with prayer, meditate thereon, and seek their meaning. The devil and temptations also afford us occasion to learn and understand the Scriptures, by experience and practice. Without these we should never understand them, however diligently we read and listened to them. The Holy Ghost must here be our only master and tutor; and let youth have no shame to learn of that preceptor. When I find myself assailed by temptation, I forthwith lay hold of some text of the Bible, which Jesus extends to me; as this: that he died for me, whence I derive infinite comfort.

V.

He who has made himself master of the principles and text of the word runs little risk of committing errors. A theologian should be thoroughly in possession of the basis and source of faith - that is to say, the Holy Scriptures. Armed with this knowledge it was that I confounded and silenced all my adversaries; for they seek not to fathom and understand the Scriptures; they run them over negligently and drowsily; they speak, they write, they teach, according to the suggestion of their heedless imaginations. My counsel is, that we draw water from the true source and fountain, that is, that we diligently search the Scriptures. He who wholly possesses the text of the Bible, is a consummate divine. One single verse, one sentence of the text, is of far more instruction than a whole host of glosses and commentaries, which are neither strongly penetrating nor armour of proof. As, when I have that text before me of St Paul: "All the creatures of God are good, if they be received with thanksgiving," this text shows, that what God has made is good. Now eating, drinking, marrying, etc., are of God's making, therefore they are good. Yet the glosses of the primitive fathers are against this text: for Bernard, Basil, Jerome, and others, have written to far other purpose. But I prefer the text to them all, though, in popedom, the glosses were deemed of higher value than the bright and clear text.

VI.

Let us not lose the Bible, but with diligence, in fear and invocation of God, read and preach it. While that remains and flourishes, all prospers with the state; its head and empress of all arts and faculties. Let but divinity fall, and I would not give a straw for the rest.

VII.

The school divines, with their speculations in holy writ, deal in pure vanities, in mere imaginings derived from human reason. Bonaventura, who is full of them, made me almost deaf. I sought to learn in his book, how God and my soul had become reconciled, but got no information from him. They talk much of the union of the will and the understanding, but `its all idle fantasy. The right, practical divinity is this: Believe in Christ, and do thy duty in that state of life to which God has called thee. In like manner, the *Mystical divinity of Dionysius* is a mere fable and lie. With Plato he chatters: *Omnia sunt non ens, et omnia sunt ens* - (all is something, and all is nothing) - and so leaves things hanging.

VIII.

Dr. Jonas Justus remarked at Luther's table: There is in the Holy Scripture a wisdom so profound, that no man may thoroughly study it or comprehend it. "Ay," said Luther, "we must ever remain scholars here; we cannot sound the depth of one single verse in Scripture; we get hold but of the A, B, C, and that imperfectly. Who can so exalt himself as to comprehend this one line of St Peter: `Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings.' Here St Peter would have us rejoice in our deepest misery and trouble, like as a child kisses the rod.

IX.

The Holy Scriptures surpass in efficaciousness all the arts and all the sciences of the philosophers and jurists; these, though good and necessary to life here below, are vain and of no effect as to what concerns the life eternal. The Bible should be regarded with wholly different eyes from those with which we view other productions. He who wholly renounces himself, and relies not on mere human reason, will make good progress in the Scriptures; but the world comprehends them not, from ignorance of that mortification which is the gift of God's Word. Can he who understands not God's Word, understand God's works? This is manifest in Adam; he called his first-born son, Cain - that is, possessor, house-lord; this son, Adam and Eve thought, would be the man of God, the blessed seed that would crush the serpent's head. Afterwards, when Eve was with child again, they hoped to have a daughter, that their beloved son, Cain, might have a wife; but Eve bearing again a son, called him Abel - that is, vanity and nothingness; as much as to say, my hope is gone, and I am deceived. This was an image of the world and of God's church, showing how things have ever gone. The ungodly Cain was a great lord in the world, while Abel, that upright and pious man, was an outcast, subject and oppressed. But before God, the case was quite contrary: Cain was rejected of God, Abel accepted and received as God's beloved child. The like is daily seen here on earth, therefore let us not heed its doings. Ishmael's was also a fair name - *hearer of God* - while Isaac's was naught. Esau's name means *actor*, the man that shall do the work - Jacob's was naught. The name Absalom, signifies *father of peace*. Such fair and glorious colors do the ungodly ever bear in this world, while in truth and deed they are condemners, scoffers, and rebels to the Word of God. But by that Word, we, God be praised, are able to discern and know all such; therefore let us hold the Bible in precious esteem, and diligently read it.

To world wisdom, there seems no lighter or more easy art than divinity, and the understanding of God's Word, so that the children of the world will be reputed fully versed in the Scriptures

and catechism, but they shoot far from the mark. I would give all my fingers, save three to write with, could I find divinity so easy and light as they take it to be. The reason why men deem it so is, that they become soon wearied, and think they know enough of it. So we found it in the world, and so we must leave it; but *in fine videbitur, cujus toni*.

X.

I have many times essayed thoroughly to investigate the ten commandments, but at the very outset, "I am the Lord thy God," I stuck fast; that very one word, I, put me to the *non-plus*. He that has but one word of God before him, and out of that word cannot make a sermon, can never be a preacher. I am well content that I know, however little, of what God's Word is, and take good heed not to murmur at my small knowledge.

XI.

I have grounded my preaching upon the literal word; he that pleases may follow me; he that will not may stay. I call upon St Peter, St Paul, Moses, and all the Saints, to say whether they ever fundamentally comprehended one single word of God, without studying it over and over and over again. The Psalm says; *His understanding is infinite*. The saints, indeed, know God's Word, and can discourse of it, but the practice is another matter; therein we shall ever remain scholars.

The school theologians have a fine similitude hereupon, that it is as with a sphere or globe, which, lying on a table, touches it only with one point, yet it is the whole table which supports the globe. Though I am an old doctor of divinity, to this day I have not got beyond the children's learning - the Ten Commandments, the Belief, and the Lord's Prayer; and these I understand not so well as I should, though I study them daily, praying, with my son John and my daughter Magdalene. If I thoroughly appreciated these first words of the Lord's Prayer, *Our Father, which art in Heaven*, and really believed that God, who made heaven and earth, and all creatures, and has all things in his hand, was my Father, then should I certainly conclude with myself, that I also am a lord of heaven and earth, that Christ is my brother, Gabriel my servant, Raphael my coachman, and all the angels my attendants at need, given unto me by my heavenly Father, to keep me in the path, that unawares I knock not my foot against a stone. But that our faith may be exercised and confirmed, our heavenly Father suffers us to be cast into dungeons, or plunged in water. So we may see how finely we understand these words, and how belief shakes, and how great our weakness is, so that we begin to think - Ah, who knows how far that is true which is set forth in the scriptures?

XII.

No greater mischief can happen to a Christian people, than to have God's Word taken from them, or falsified, so that they no longer have it pure and clear. God grant we and our descendants be not witnesses of such a calamity.

XIII.

When we have God's Word pure and clear, then we think ourselves all right; we become negligent, and repose in a vain security; we no longer pay due heed, thinking it will always so remain; we do not watch and pray against the devil, who is ready to tear the Divine Word out of our hearts. It is with us as with travelers, who, so long as they are on the highway, are tranquil and heedless, but if they go astray into the woods or cross paths, uneasily seek which way to take, this or that.

XIV.

The great men and the doctors understand not the word of God, but it is revealed to the humble and to children, as it testified by the Saviour in the Gospel according to St Matthew, xi. 25: "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Gregory says, well and rightly, that the Holy Scripture is a stream of running water, where alike the elephant may swim, and the lamb walk without losing its feet.

XV.

The great un-thankfulness, contempt of God's Word, and wilfulness of the world, make me fear that the divine light will soon cease to shine on man, for God's Word has ever had its certain course.

In the time of kings of Judah, Baal obscured the brightness of God's Word, and it became hard labor to destroy his empire over the hearts of men. Even in the time of the apostles, there were heresies, errors, and evil doctrines spread abroad by false brethren. Next came Arius, and the Word of God was hidden behind dark clouds, but the holy fathers, Ambrose, Hilary, Augustine, Athanasius, and others, dispersed the obscurity. Greece and many other countries have heard the Word of God, but have since abandoned it, and it is to be feared even now it may quit Germany, and go into other lands. I hope the last day will not be long delayed. The darkness grows thicker around us, and godly servants of the Most High become rarer and more rare. Impiety and licentiousness are rampant throughout the world, and live like pigs, like wild beasts, devoid of all reason. But a voice will soon be heard thundering forth: *Behold, the bridegroom cometh*. God will not be able to bear this wicked world much longer, but will come, with the dreadful day, and chastise the scorners of his word.

XVI.

Kings, princes, lords, any one will needs understand the gospel far better than I, Martin Luther, ay, or even than St Paul; for they deem themselves wise and full of policy. But herein they scorn and condemn, not us, poor preachers and ministers, but the Lord and Governor of all preachers and ministers, who has sent us to preach and teach, and who will scorn and condemn them in such sort, that they shall smart again; even He that says: "Whoso heareth you, heareth me; and whoso toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye." The great ones would govern, but they know not how.

XVII.

Dr. Justus Jonas told Dr. Martin Luther of a noble and powerful Misnian, who above all things occupied himself in amassing gold and silver, and was so buried in darkness, that he gave no heed to the five books of Moses, and had even said to Dr. John Frederic, who was discoursing with him upon the Gospel: "Sir, the Gospel pays no interest." "Have you no grains?" interposed Luther; and then told this fable: - "A lion making a great feast, invited all the beasts, and with them some swine. When all manner of dainties were set before the guests, the swine asked: `Have you no grains?'" "Even so," continued the doctor, "even so, in these days, it is with our epicureans: we preachers set before them, in our churches, the most dainty and costly dishes, as everlasting salvation, the remission of sins, and God's grace; but they, like swine, turn up their snouts, and ask for guilders: offer a cow nutmeg, and she will reject for old hay. This reminds me of the answer of certain parishioners to their minister, Ambrose R. He had been earnestly exhorting them to come and listen to the Word of God: `Well,' said they, `if you will tap a good barrel of beer for us, we'll come with all our hearts and hear you.' The gospel at Wittenberg is like unto the rain which, falling upon a river, produces little effect; but descending upon a dry, thirsty soil, renders it fertile."

XVIII.

Some one asked Luther for his Psalter, which was old and ragged, promising to give him a new one in exchange; but the doctor refused, because he was used to his own old copy, adding: "A local memory is very useful, and I have weakened mine in translating the Bible."

XIX.

Our case will go on, so long as its living advocates, Melancthon, and other pious and learned persons, who apply themselves zealously to the work, shall be alive; but after their death, `twill be a sad falling off. We have an example before us, in Judges ii. 10: "And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel." So, after the death of the apostles, there were fearful fallings off; nay, even while they yet lived, as St Paul complains, there was falling off among the Galatians, the Corinthians, and in Asia. We shall be occasioned much suffering and loss by the Sacramentarians, the Anabapitsts, the Antinomians, and other sectaries.

XX.

Oh! how great and glorious a thing it is to have before one the Word of God! With that we may at all times feel joyous and secure; we need never be in want of consolation, for we see before us, in all its brightness, the pure and right way. He who loses sight of the Word of God, falls into despair; the voice of heaven no longer sustains him; he follows only the disorderly tendency of his heart, and of world vanity, which lead him on to his destruction.

XXI.

Christ, in Matthew, v., vi., vii., teaches briefly these points: first, as to the eight happinesses or blessings, how every Christian ought particularly to live as it concerns himself; secondly, of

the office of teaching, what and how a man ought to teach in the church, how to season with salt and enlighten, reprove, and comfort, and exercise the faith; thirdly, he confutes and opposes the false expounding of the law; fourthly, he condemns the wicked hypocritical kind of living; fifthly, he teaches what are upright and good works; sixthly, he warns men of false doctrine; seventhly, he clears and solves what might be found doubtful and confused; eighthly, he condemns the hypocrites and false saints, who abuse the precious word of grace.

XXII.

St Luke describes Christ's passion better than the rest; John is more complete as to Christ's works; he describes the audience, and how the cause was handled, and how they proceeded before the seat of judgment, and how Christ was questioned, and for what cause he was slain.

When Pilate asked him: "Art thou the king of the Jews?" "Yea," said Christ, "I am; but not such a king as the emperor is, for then my servants and armies would fight and strive to deliver and defend me; but I am a king sent to preach the gospel, and give record of the truth which I must speak." "What!" said Pilate, "art thou such a king, and hast thou a kingdom that consists in word and truth?" then surely thou canst be no prejudice to me." Doubtless, Pilate took our Saviour Christ to be a simple, honest, ignorant man, one perchance come out of a wilderness, a simple, honest fellow, a hermit, who knew or understood nothing of the world, or of government.

XXIII.

In the writings of St Paul and St John is a surpassing certainty, knowledge, and *plerophoria*. They write as if all they narrate had been already done before their eyes.

Christ rightly says of St Paul, he shall be a chosen instrument and vessel unto me; therefore he was made a doctor, and therefore he spake so certainly of the cause. Whoso reads Paul may, with a safe conscience, build upon his words; for my part, I never read more serious writings.

St John, in his gospel, describes Christ, that he is a true and natural man, *a priori*, from former time: "In the beginning was the word;" and "Whoso honoreth me, the same honoreth also the Father." But Paul describes Christ, *a posteriori et effectu* from that which follows, and according to the actions or works, as, "They tempted Christ in the wilderness;" "Take heed, therefore, to yourselves." etc.

XXIV.

The book of Solomon's Proverbs is a fine book, which rulers and governors should diligently read, for it contains lessons touching God's anger, wherein governors and rulers should exercise themselves.

The author of the book of Ecclesiastics preaches the law well, but he is no prophet. It is not the work of Solomon, any more than is the book of Solomon's Proverbs. They are both collections made by other people.

The third book of Esdras I throw into the Elbe; there are, in the fourth, pretty knacks enough; as, "The wine is strong, the king is stronger, women strongest of all; but the truth is stronger than all these."

The book of Judith is not a history. It accords not with geography. I believe it is a poem, like the legends of the saints, composed by some good man, to the end he might show how Judith, a personification of the Jews, as God-fearing people, by whom God is known and confessed, overcame and vanquished Holofernes - that is, all the kingdoms of the world. `Its a figurative work, like that of Homer about Troy, and that of Virgil about Aeneas, wherein is shown how a great prince ought to be adorned with surpassing valor, like a brave champion, with wisdom and understanding, great courage and alacrity, fortune, honor, and justice. It is a tragedy, setting forth what the end of tyrants is. I take the book of Tobit to be a comedy concerning women, an example for house-government. I am so great an enemy to the second book of the Maccabees, and to Esther, that I wish they had not come to us at all, for they have too many heathen unnaturalities. The Jews much more esteemed the book of Esther than any of the prophets; though they were forbidden to read it before they had attained the age of thirty, by reason of the mystic matters it contains. They utterly condemn Daniel and Isaiah, those two holy and glorious prophets, of whom the former, in the clearest manner, preaches Christ, while the other describes and portrays the kingdom of Christ, and the monarchies and empires of the world preceeding it. Jeremiah comes but after them.

The discourses of the prophets were none of them regularly committed to writing at the time; their disciples and hearers collected them subsequently, one, one piece, another, another, and thus was the complete collection formed.

When Doctor Justus Jonas had translated the book of Tobit, he attended Luther therewith, and said: "Many ridiculous things are contained in this book, especially about the three nights, and the liver of the broiled fish, wherewith the devil was scared and driven away." Whereupon Luther said: "Its a Jewish conceit; the devil, a fierce and powerful enemy, will not be hunted away in such sort, for he has the spear of Goliah; but God gives him such weapons, that, when he is overcome by the godly, it may be the greater terror and vexation unto him. Daniel and Isaiah are most excellent prophets. I am Isaiah - be it spoken with humility - to the advancement of God's honor, whose work alone it is, and to spite the devil. Philip Melancthon is Jeremiah; that prophet stood always in fear; even so it is with Melancthon."

XXV.

In the book of the Judges, the valiant champions and deliverers are described, who were sent by God, believing and trusting wholly in him, according to the first commandment: they committed themselves, their actions, and enterprises to God, and gave him thanks: they relied only upon the God of heaven and said: Lord God, thou hast done these things, and not we; to thee only be the glory. The book of the Kings is excellent - a hundred times better than the Chronicles, which constantly pass over the most important facts, without any details whatever.

The book of Job is admirable; it is not written only touching himself, but also for the comfort and consolation of all sorrowful, troubled and perplexed hearts who resist the devil. When he

conceived that God began to be angry with him, he became impatient, and was much offended; it vexed and grieved him that the ungodly prospered so well. Therefore it should be a comfort to poor Christians that are persecuted and forced to suffer, that in the life to come, God will give unto them exceeding great and glorious benefits, and everlasting wealth and honor.

XXVI.

We need not wonder that Moses so briefly described the history of the ancient patriarchs, when we see that the Evangelists, in the shortest measure, describe the sermons in the New Testament, running briefly through them, and giving but a touch of the preachings of John the Baptist, which, doubtless, were the most beautiful.

XXVII.

Saint John the Evangelist speaks majestically, yet with very plain and simple words; as where he says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not."

See how he describes God the Creator, and also his creatures, in plain, clear language, as with a sunbeam. If one of our philosophers or high learned men had described them, what wonderful swelling and high-trotting words would he have paraded, *de ente et es senti*, so that no man could have understood what he meant. `Its a great lesson, how mighty divine truth is, which presses through, though she be hemmed in ever so closely; the more she is read, the more she moves and takes possession of the heart.

XXVIII.

The Psalms of David are of various kinds - didactic, prophetic, eucharistic, catechetical. Among the prophetic, we should particularly distinguish the 110th, *Dixit Dominus*; and among the didactic, the *Miserere Mei*, *De profundis*, and *Domine, exaudi orationem*. The 110th is very fine. It describes the kingdom and priesthood of Jesus Christ, and declares him to be the King of all things, and the intercessor for all men; to whom all things have been remitted by his Father, and who has compassion on us all. `Its a noble Psalm; if I were well, I would endeavor to make a commentary on it.

XXIX.

Dr. Luther was asked whether the history of the rich man and Lazarus was a parable or a natural fact? He replied: The earlier part of the story is evidently historical; the persons, the circumstances, the existence of the five brothers, all this is given in detail. The reference to Abraham is allegorical, and highly worthy of observation. We learn from it that there are abodes unknown to us, where the souls of men are; secrets into which we must not inquire. No mention is made of Lazarus' grave; whence we may judge, that in God's eyes, the soul

occupies far more place than the body. Abraham's bosom is the promise and assurance of salvation, and the expectation of Jesus Christ; not heaven itself, but the expectation of heaven.

XXX.

Before the Gospel came among us, men used to undergo endless labour and cost, and make dangerous journeys to St James of Compostella, and where not, in order to seek the favor of God. But now that God, in his Word, brings his favours unto us gratis, confirming it with his sacraments, saying, *Unless ye believe, ye shall surely perish*, we will have none of it.

XXXI.

I have lived to see the greatest plague on earth - the condemning of God's Word, a fearful thing, surpassing all other plagues in the world; for thereupon most surely follow all manner of punishment, eternal and corporal. Did I desire for a man all bitter plagues and curses, I would wish him the condemning of God's Word, for he would then have them all at once come upon him, both inward and outward misfortunes. The condemning of God's Word is the forerunner of God's punishments; as the examples witness in the times of Lot, of Noah, and of our Saviour.

XXXII.

Whoso acknowledges that the writings of the Evangelists are God's Word, with him we are willing to dispute; but whoso denies this, with him we will not exchange a word; we may not converse with those who reject the first principles.

XXXIII.

In all sciences, the ablest professors are they who have thoroughly mastered the texts. A man, to be a good jurisconsult, should have every text of the law at his fingers' ends; but in our time, the attention is applied rather to glosses and commentaries. When I was young, I read the Bible over and over and over again, and was so perfectly acquainted with it, that I could, in an instant, have pointed to any verse that might have been mentioned. I then read the commentators, but I soon threw them aside, for I found therein many things my conscience could not approve, as being contrary to the sacred text. Its always better to see with one's own eyes than with those of other people.

XXXIV.

The words of the Hebrew tongue have a peculiar energy. It is impossible to convey so much so briefly in any other language. To render them intelligibly, we must not attempt to give word for word, but only aim at the sense and idea. In translating Moses, I made it my effort to avoid Hebraism; it was an arduous business. The wise ones, who affect greater knowledge than myself on the subject, take me to task for a word here and there. Did they attempt the labor I have accomplished, I would find a thousand blunders in them for my one.

XXXV.

Bullinger said to me, he was earnest against the sectaries, as condemners of God's Word, and also against those who dwelt too much on the literal Word, who, he said, sinned against God and his almighty power, as the Jews did in naming the ark, God. But he who holds a mean between both, apprehends the right use of the sacraments. To which I answered: "By this error, you separate the Word from the spirit; those who preach and teach the Word, from God who commands baptism. You hold that the Holy Ghost is given and works without the Word, which Word, you say, is an eternal sign and mark to find the spirit that already possesses the heart; so that, according to you, if the Word find not the spirit, but an ungodly person, then it is not God's Word; thus defining and fixing the Word, not according to God, who speaks it, but according as people entertain and receive it. You grant that to be God's Word, which purifies and brings peace and life; but when it works not in the ungodly, it is not God's Word. You teach that the outward Word is as an object or picture, signifying and representing something; you measure its use only according to the matter, as a human creature speaks for himself; you will not grant that God's Word is an instrument through which the Holy Ghost works and accomplishes his work, and prepares a beginning to righteousness or justification.

"A true Christian must hold for certain that the Word which is delivered and preached to the wicked, the dissemblers, and the ungodly, is as much God's Word, as that which is preached to godly, upright Christians, and that the true Christian church is among sinners, where good and bad are mingled together. And that the Word, whether it produce fruit or no, is, nevertheless, God's strength, which saves all that believe therein. Clearly, it will also judge the ungodly, (St John, c.v.) otherwise, these might plead a good excuse before God, that they ought not to be condemned, since they had not had God's Word, and consequently could not have received it. But I teach that the preacher's words, absolution, and sacraments, are not his words or works, but God's, cleansing, absolving, binding, etc.; we are but the instruments or assistants, by whom God works. You say, it is the man that preaches, reproveth, absolves, comforts, etc., though it is God that cleanses the hearts and forgives; but I say, God himself preaches, threatens, reproveth, affrights, comforts, absolves, administers the sacraments, etc. As our Saviour Christ says: "Whoso heareth you, heareth me; and what ye loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven," etc. And again: "It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you."

"I am sure and certain, when I go up to the pulpit to preach or read, that it is not my Word I speak, but that my tongue is the pen of a ready writer, as the Psalmist has it. God speaks in the prophets and men of God, as St Peter in his epistle says: "The holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Therefore we must not separate or part God and man, according to our natural reason and understanding. In like manner, every hearer must say: I hear not St Paul, St Peter, or a man speak, but God himself.

"If I were addicted to God's Word at all times alike, and always had such love and desire thereunto as sometimes I have, then should I account myself the most blessed man on earth. But the loving apostle, St Paul, failed also herein, as he complains, with sighs, saying: "I see another law in my members warring against the law in my mind." Should the Word be false,

because it bears not always fruit? The search after the Word has been, from the beginning of the world, the source of great danger; few people can hit it, unless God, through his Holy Spirit, teach it them in their hearts."

Bullinger, having attentively listened to this discourse, knelt down and uttered these words, "O, happy hour that brought me to hear this man of God, the chosen vessel of the Lord, declaring his truth! I abjure and utterly renounce my former errors, thus beaten down by God's infallible Word." He then arose and threw his arms around Luther's neck, both shedding joyful tears.

XXXVI.

Forsheim said that the first of the five books of Moses was not written by Moses himself. Dr. Luther replied: What matters it, even though Moses did not write it? It is, nevertheless, Moses's book, wherein is exactly related the creation of the world. Such futile objections as these should not be listened to.

XXXVII.

In cases of religion and that concern God's Word, we must be sure and certain, without wavering, so that in time of trial and temptation their acknowledgment may be distinct, and we may not afterwards say, *Non putarem*; a course which in temporal matters often involves much danger, but in divinity is doubly mischievous. Thus the canonists, the popish dissemblers, and other heretics, are right chimeras; in the face resembling a fair virgin, the body being like a lion, and the tail like a snake. Even so it is with their doctrine; it glitters, and has a fair aspect, and what they teach is agreeable to mortal wisdom and appreciation, and acquires repute. Afterwards, lion-like, it breaks through by force, for all false teachers commonly make use of the secular arm; but in the end, it shows itself a slippery doctrine, having, like a snake, a smooth skin, sliding through the hand.

Once sure that the doctrine we teach is God's Word, once certain of this, we may build thereupon, and know that this cause shall and must remain; the devil shall not be able to overthrow it, much less the world be able to uproot it, how fiercely so ever it rage. I, God be praised, surely know that the doctrine I teach is God's Word, and have now hunted from my heart all other doctrines and faiths, of what name so ever, that do not concur with God's Word. Thus have I overcome the heavy temptations that sometimes tormented me, thus: Art thou, asked the devilish thought within, the only man that has God's Word, pure and clear, all others failing therein? For thus does Satan vex and assault us, under the name and title of God's church; what, says he, that doctrine which the Christian church has so many years held, and established as right, wilt thou presume to reject and overthrow it with thy new doctrine, as though it were false and erroneous, thereby producing trouble, alteration, and confusion, both in spiritual and temporal government?

I find this argument of the devil in all the prophets, whom the rulers, both in church and state, have ever upbraided, saying: We are God's people, placed and ordained by God in an established government; what we settle and acknowledge as right, that must and shall be

observed. What fools are ye that presume to teach us, the best and largest part, there being of you but a handful? Truly, in this case, we must not only be well armed with God's Word, and versed therein, but must have also certainty of the doctrine, or we shall not endure the combat. A man must be able to affirm, I know for certain, that what I teach is the only Word of the high Majesty of God in heaven, his final conclusion and everlasting, unchangeable truth, and whatsoever concurs and agrees not with this doctrine, is altogether false, and spun by the devil. I have before me God's Word which cannot fail, nor can the gates of hell prevail against it; thereby will I remain, though the whole world be against me. And withal, I have this comfort, that God says: I will give thee people and hearers that shall receive it; cast thy care upon me; I will defend thee, only remain thou stout and steadfast by my Word.

We must not regard what or how the world esteems us, so we have the Word pure, and are certain of our doctrine. Hence Christ, in John viii. "Which of you convinceth me of sin:?" All the apostles were most certain of their doctrine; and St Paul, in special manner, insists on the *Plerophoria*, where he says to Timothy: "It is a dear and precious word, that Jesus Christ is come into the world to save sinners." The faith toward God in Christ must be sure and steadfast, that it may solace and make glad the conscience, and put it to rest. When a man has this certainty, he has overcome the serpent; but if he be doubtful of the doctrine, it is for him very dangerous to dispute with the devil.

XXXVIII.

A fiery shield is God's Word; of more substance and purer than gold, which, tried in the fire, loses naught of its substance, but resists and overcomes all the fury of the fiery heat; even so, he that believes God's Word overcomes all, and remains secure everlastingly, against all misfortunes; for this shield fears nothing, neither hell nor the devil.

XXXIX.

I never thought the world had been so wicked, when the Gospel began, as now I see it is; I rather hoped that every one would have leaped for joy to have found himself freed from the filth of the pope, from his lamentable molestations of poor troubled consciences, and that through Christ they would by faith obtain the celestial treasure they sought after before with such vast cost and labor, though in vain. And especially I thought the bishops and universities would with joy of heart have received the true doctrines, but I have been lamentably deceived. Moses and Jeremiah, too, complained they had been deceived.

XL.

The thanks the world now gives to the doctrine of the gospel, is the same it gave to Christ, namely, the cross; `its what we must expect. This year is the year of man's ingratitude: the next will be the year of God's chasitement; for God must needs chasitse, though `its against his nature: we will have it so.

XLI.

Ah, how impious and ungrateful is the world, thus to condemn and persecute God's ineffable grace! And we - we ourselves - who boast of the gospel, and know it to be God's Word, and recognize it for such, yet hold it in no more esteem and respect than we do Virgil or Terence. Truly, I am less afraid of the pope and his tyrants, than I am of our own ingratitude towards the Word of God: `its this will place the pope in his saddle again. But, first, I hope the day of judgment will come.

XLII.

God has his measuring lines and his canons, called the Ten Commandments; they are written in our flesh and blood: the sum of them is this: "What thou wouldest have done to thyself, the same do thou to another." God presses upon this point, saying: "Such measure as thou metest, the same shall be measured to thee again." With this measuring line has God marked the whole world. They that live and do thereafter, well it is with them, for God richly rewards them in this life.

XLIII.

Is it true that God speaks himself with us in the Holy Scriptures? thou that doubtst this, must needs think in thy heart that God is a liar, one that says a thing, and performs it not; but thou mayest be sure when he opens his mouth, it is as much as three worlds. God, with one sole word, moulded the whole world. In Psalm xxxiii. it is said: "When he speaketh, it is done; when he commandeth, it standeth fast."

XLIV.

We must make a great difference between God's Word and the word of man. A man's word is a little sound, that flies into the air, and soon vanishes; but the Word of God is greater than heaven and earth, yea, greater than death and hell, for it forms part of the power of God, and endures everlastingly; we should, therefore, diligently study God's Word, and know and assuredly believe that God himself speaks unto us. This was what David saw and believed, who said: "God spake in his holiness, thereof I am glad." We should also be glad; but this gladness is oftentimes mixed up with sorrow and pain, of which, again, David is an example, who underwent manifold trials and tribulations in connection with the murder and adultery he had committed. It was no honeymoon for him, when he was hunted from one place to another, to the end he might after remain in God's fear. In the second Psalm he says: "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling."

XLV.

The student of theology has now far greater advantages than students ever before had; first, he has the Bible, which I have translated from Hebrew into German, so clearly and distinctly, that any one may readily comprehend it; next, he has Melancthon's *Common-place Book* (Loci Communes), which he should read over and over again, until he has it by heart. Once master of these two volumes, he may be regarded as a theologian whom neither devil nor heretic can overcome; for he has all divinity at his fingers' ends, and may read, understandingly,

whatsoever else he pleases. Afterwards, he may study Melancthon's Commentary on Romans, and mine on Deuteronomy and on the Galatians, and practice eloquence.

We possess no work wherein the whole body of theology, wherein religion, is more completely summed up, than in Melancthon's *Common-place Book*; all the Fathers, all the compilers of sentences, put together, are not to be compared with this book. `Tis, after the Scriptures, the most perfect of works. Melancthon is a better logician than myself; he argues better. My superiority lies rather in the rhetorical way. If the printers would take my advice, they would print those of my books which set forth doctrine, - as my commentaries on Deuteronomy, on Galatians, and the sermons on the four books of St John. My other writings scarce serve better purpose than to mark the progress of the revelation of the gospel.

XLVI.

Christ (Luke viii.) says, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God." Here a man might ask, What mystery is that? If a mystery, why do you preach it? Whereunto I answer: A mystery is a thing hidden and secret; the mysteries of the kingdom of God are such things as lie hidden in the kingdom of God; but he that knows Christ aright, knows what God's kingdom is, and what therein is to be found. They are mysteries, because secret and hidden from human sense and reason, when the Holy Ghost does not reveal them; for though many hear of them, they neither conceive nor understand them. There are now many among us who preach of Christ, and hear much spoken of him, as that he gave himself to death for us, but this lies only upon the tongue, and not in the heart; for they neither believe it, nor are sensible of it; as St Paul says: "The natural man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God."

Those on whom the Spirit of God falls, not only hear and see it, but also receive it within their hearts and believe, and therefore it is no mystery or secret to them.

XLVII.

`T was a special gift of God that speech was given to mankind; for through the Word, and not by force, wisdom governs. Through the Word people are taught and comforted, and thereby all sorrow is made light, especially in cases of the conscience. Therefore God gave to his Church an eternal Word to hear, and the sacraments to use. But this holy function of preaching the Word is, by Satan, fiercely resisted; he would willingly have it utterly suppressed, for thereby his kingdom is destroyed.

Truly speech has wonderful strength and power, that through a mere word, proceeding out of the mouth of a poor human creature, the devil, that so proud and powerful spirit, should be driven away, shamed and confounded.

The sectaries are so impudent, that they dare to reject the word of the mouth; and to smooth their damnable opinions, say: No external thing makes one to be saved; the word of the mouth and the sacraments are external things: therefore they make us not to be saved. But I answer: We must discriminate wholly between the external things of God and the outward things of

man. The external things of God are powerful and saving; it is not so with the outward things of man.

XLVIII.

God alone, through his Word, instructs the heart, so that it may come to the serious knowledge how wicked it is, and corrupt and hostile to God. Afterwards God brings man to the knowledge of God, and how he may be freed from sin, and how, after this miserable, evanescent world, he may obtain life everlasting. Human reason, with all its wisdom, can bring it no further than to instruct people how to live honestly and decently in the world, how to keep house, build, etc., things learned from philosophy and heathenish books. But how they should learn to know God and his dear Son, Christ Jesus, and to be saved, this the Holy Ghost alone teaches through God's Word; for philosophy understands naught of divine matters. I don't say that men may not teach and learn philosophy; I approve thereof, so that it be within reason and moderation. Let philosophy remain within her bounds, as God has appointed, and let us make use of her as of a character in a comedy; but to mix her up with divinity may not be endured; nor is it tolerable to make faith an *accidens* or quality, happening by chance; for such words are merely philosophical - used in schools and in temporal affairs, which human sense and reason may comprehend. But faith is a thing in the heart, having its being and substance by itself, given of God as his proper work, not a corporal thing, that may be seen, felt, or touched.

XLIX.

We must know how to teach God's Word aright, discerningly, for there are divers sorts of hearers; some are struck with fear in the conscience, are perplexed, and awed by their sins, and, in apprehension of God's anger, are penitent; these must be comforted with the consolations of the gospel. Others are hardened, obstinate, stiff-necked, rebel-hearted; these must be affrighted by the law, by examples of God's wrath: as the fires of Elijah, the deluge, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the downfall of Jerusalem. These hard heads need sound knocks.

L.

The gospel of the remission of sins through faith in Christ, is received of few people; most men little regard the sweet and comfortable tidings of the gospel; some hear it, but only even so as they hear mass in popedom; the majority attend God's Word out of custom, and, when they have done that, think all is well. The case is, the sick, needing a physician, welcome him; but he that is well, cares not for him, as we see by the Canaanitish woman in Matthew xv., who felt her own and her daughter's necessities, and therefore ran after Christ, and in nowise would suffer herself to be denied or sent away from him. In like manner, Moses was fain to go before, and learn to feel sins, that so grace might taste the sweeter. Therefore, it is but labour lost (how familiar and loving soever Christ be figured unto us), except we first be humbled through the acknowledgment of our sins, and so yearn after Christ, as the *Magnificat* says: "He filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away," words spoken for the comfort of all, and for instruction of miserable, poor, needful sinners, and condemned

people, to the end that in all their deepest sorrows and necessities they may know with whom to take refuge and seek aid and consolation.

But we must take fast hold on God's Word, and believe all true which that says of God, though God and all his creatures should seem unto us other than as the Word speaks, as we see the Canaanitish woman did. The Word is sure, and fails not, though heaven and earth must pass away. Yet, oh! how hard is this to natural sense and reason, that it must strip itself naked, and abandon all it comprehends and feels, depending only upon the bare Word. The Lord of his mercy help us with faith in our necessities, and at our last end, when we strive with death.

LI.

Heaven and earth, all the emperors, kings, and princes of the world, could not raise a fit dwelling-place for God; yet, in a weak human soul, that keeps his Word, he willingly resides. Isaiah calls heaven the Lord's seat, and earth his footstool; he does not call them his dwelling-place; when we seek after God, we shall find him with them that keep his Word. Christ says: "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Nothing could be simpler or clearer than these words of the Saviour, and yet he confounds herewith all the wisdom of the worldly-wise. He sought to speak *non in sublimi sed humili genere*. If I had to teach a child, I would teach him in the same way.

LII.

Great is the strength of the Divine Word. In the epistle to the Hebrews, it is called "a two-edged sword." But we have neglected and condemned the pure and clear Word, and have drunk not of the fresh and cool spring; we are gone from the clear fountain to the foul puddle, and drunk its filthy water; that is, we have sedulously read old writers and teachers, who went about with speculative reasonings, like the monks and friars.

The words of our Saviour Christ are exceeding powerful; they have hands and feet; they outdo the utmost subtleties of the worldly-wise, as we see in the gospel, where Christ confounds the wisdom of the Pharisees with plain and simple words, so that they knew not which way to turn and wind themselves. It was a sharp syllogism of his: "Give unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's;" wherewith he neither commanded nor prohibited, but snared them in their own casuistry.

LIII.

Where God's Word is taught pure and not falsified, there is also poverty, as Christ says: "I am sent to preach the Gospel to the poor." More than enough has been given to unprofitable, lazy, ungodly people in monasteries and cells, who lead us into danger of body and soul; but not one farthing is given, willingly, to a Christian teacher. Superstition, idolatry, and hypocrisy, have ample wages, but truth goes a begging.

LIV.

When God preaches his Word, then presently follows the cross to godly Christians; as St Paul testifies: "All that will live a godly life in Christ-Jesus must suffer persecution." And our Saviour: "The disciple is not greater than the master: have they persecuted me? They will persecute you also." the work rightly expounds and declares the Word, as the prophet Isaiah: Grief and sorrow teach how to mark the Word. No man understands the Scriptures, unless he be acquainted with the cross.

LV.

In the time of Christ and the apostles, God's Word was a word of doctrine, which was preached everywhere in the world; afterwards in popedom it was a Word of reading, which they only read, but understood not. In this our time, it is made a Word of strife, which fights and strives; it will endure its enemies no longer, but remove them out of the way.

LVI.

Like as in the world a child is an heir only because it is born to inherit, even so, faith only makes such to be God's children as are born of the Word, which is the womb wherein we are conceived, born, and nourished, as the prophet Isaiah says. Now, as through such a birth we become God's children, (wrought by God without our help or doing,) even so, we are also heirs, and being heirs, are freed from sin, death, and the devil, and shall inherit everlasting life.

LVII.

I admonish every pious Christian that he take not offence at the plain, unvarnished manner of speech of the Bible. Let him reflect that what may seem trivial and vulgar to him, emanates from the high majesty, power, and wisdom of God. The Bible is the book that makes fools of the wise of this world; it is only understood by the plain and simple hearted. Esteem this book as the precious fountain that can never be exhausted. In it thou findest the swaddling-clothes and the manger whither the angels directed the poor, simple shepherds; they seem poor and mean, but dear and precious is the treasure that lies therein.

LVIII.

The ungodly papists prefer the authority of the church far above God's Word; a blasphemy abominable and not to be endured; wherewith, void of all shame and piety, they spit in God's face. Truly, God's patience is exceeding great, in that they be not destroyed; but so it always has been.

LIX.

In times past, as in part of our own, 't was dangerous work to study, when divinity and all good arts were condemned, and fine, expert, and prompt wits were plagued with sophistry. Aristotle, the heathen, was held in such repute and honour, that whoso undervalued or

contradicted him, was held, at Cologne, for an heretic; whereas they themselves understood not Aristotle.

LX.

In the apostles' time, and in our own, the gospel was and is preached more powerfully and spread further than it was in the time of Christ; for Christ had not such repute, nor so many hearers as the apostles had, and as now we have. Christ himself says to his disciples; Ye shall do greater works than I; I am but a little grain of mustard-seed; but ye shall be like the vine-tree, and as the arms and boughs wherein the birds shall build their nests.

LXI.

All men now presume to criticize the gospel. Almost every old doting fool or prating sophist must, forsooth, be a doctor in divinity. All other arts and sciences have masters, of whom people must learn, and rules and regulations which must be observed and obeyed; the Holy Scripture only, God's Word, must be subject to each man's pride and presumption; hence; so many sects, seducers, and offences.

LXII.

I did not learn my divinity at once, but was constrained by my temptations to search deeper and deeper; for no man, without trials and temptations, can attain a true understanding of the Holy Scriptures. St Paul had a devil that beat him with fists, and with temptations drove him diligently to study the Holy Scripture. I had hanging on my neck the pope, the universities, all the deep-learned, and the devil; these hunted me into the Bible, wherein I sedulously read, and thereby, God be praised, at length attained a true understanding of it. Without such a devil, we are but only speculators of divinity, and according to our vain reasoning, dream that so and so it must be, as the monks and friars in monasteries do. The Holy Scripture of itself is certain and true; God grant me grace to catch hold of its just use.

[HOME](#)

[TABLE TALK INDEX](#)